

2004 People Helping People Business Awards

Nominee – Raymond Nelson

Category – Unsung Hero Award

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This nomination is submitted by:

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Nominee Information

Raymond Nelson
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Nominee Information:

1. Name of nominated program(s)

Help Rusty Help Others Marrow and Blood Drive
2. Are other organizations collaborating? If so, please name them.

BloodSource is submitting this nomination.
3. When did the program(s) start?

Some times big things happen in very little time! 14 days is not much time to make big things happen; yet that is exactly what Raymond Nelson did when his good friend Rusty Hammer asked for help. In mid-October, Rusty told Raymond that he needed a marrow transplant and no one in his family was a match. To beat leukemia and to have a chance at surviving Rusty needed a transplant soon. He asked Raymond to help him get people to register for the National Marrow Donor Program – and just maybe a match would be found. What does one do when a friend says, “I need your help to live.” Without a marrow transplant Rusty’s chance of survival is slim.

What Raymond did was a bit of research – he learned as much as he could about marrow transplants, the local marrow program, the fees for getting people onto the National Marrow Donor Program registry, and how it works. What he learned is that time was short, marrow testing expensive and finding a match for a patient in need, like his friend, is like finding a needle in a haystack. The chance of finding a marrow match for Rusty is from 1 in 20,000 to on in a million or millions. He was determined to help – his friend’s life depended upon him doing something, quickly.

Raymond called together some close friends very quickly – friends who understood the urgency of the situation and who were willing to do some hard work. He contacted BloodSource, the regional blood center responsible for the National Marrow Donor Program registry for much of Northern and Central California. He pulled in people from the Sacramento Metro Chamber of Commerce, the organization Rusty led for nearly eight years. He enlisted the help of people from the American Leadership Forum because Rusty was involved with their program. And, Raymond recruited his wife, also a very close friend of Rusty and Pamela Hammer.

It was immediately clear that to get people to be tested for the National Marrow Donor Program a special event would have to be created, money raised for testing, publicity generated if people were to learn about the event, and a good location that could accommodate the hundreds of people needed.

4. Who is participating? Raymond Nelson brought together his close friends, his wife, his colleagues from work, BloodSource, Sacramento Metro Chamber, Sutter Health, CHW/Mercy, Kaiser Permanente, Blue Shield, Cardinal Health, Krispy Kreme, Coca-Cola, Raley's, Tarts and Truffles, Papa John's Pizza, Crocker Flanagan, Tom Sullivan, local television, radio and The Sacramento Bee. Through his efforts more than \$45,000 was raised in just 10 days to cover the fees associated with Human Leukocyte Antigen (HLA) testing required for the National Marrow Donor Program registry and more than 700 people added to the National Marrow Donor Program registry.

5. Who benefits from the programs? More than 3,000 people are looking for marrow matches every day of the week. Raymond's efforts have the potential to impact patients who need marrow transplants – not only locally but also across the nation and around the globe.

Description: In one day more than 600 people were added to the National Marrow Donor Program registry, proving once again the power of people working together for a good cause. That cause was the "Helping Rusty Help Others" marrow drive on Saturday, November 8, 2003.

Emotions ran high as friends and strangers gathered throughout the day to help. The usual \$65 registration fee for marrow registry testing was waived through generous donations from Sutter Health, Kaiser Permanente, CHW/Mercy, Cardinal Health and Blue Shield. Special treats were provided by Krispy Kreme, Raley's, Tarts and Truffles, Papa John's Pizza and Coca-Cola. Volunteers from the Sacramento Metro Chamber, the American Leadership Forum, friends of Rusty Hammer along with a team of BloodSource volunteers all helped to greet the public and make them feel welcome.

Rusty Hammer and his wife, Pam, were overwhelmed by the support of friends acquaintances and strangers. When they entered the front door of BloodSource-Sacramento and saw the hundreds of people lined up to help, tears came to their eyes. The Hammers intended to stay only for a short time as Rusty was weary from chemotherapy, travel from Los Angeles to Sacramento for this event, and the emotions that come from a battle against leukemia. He received a transfusion of platelets and red cells before heading north something he says is truly an incredible gift so vitally important when dealing with the stresses of chemotherapy. Wearing a mask to prevent infection, Rusty hugged and shared good wishes with people he knew well and others he never knew before Saturday. They

stayed almost four hours.

Rusty and Pam also met local people who are doing well after battling leukemia with marrow transplants and blood transfusions. They heard stories just like their own from people also looking for donor matches in their own battles against leukemia. They all agreed it takes someone who is well known in a community to get others to understand the importance of something like the National Marrow Donor Program registry in helping to save lives.

Impact: Marrow transplants are needed for people who may die without them. What Raymond has done is incredible – he has given hope to a friend and life to many. For years to come marrow matches will be found for people who would die without a transplant – all because he helped a friend.

Raymond is just beginning his efforts to add people to the marrow registry. Somehow, I think we will hear lots from Raymond Nelson in the years to come – he will be insisting we help – one patient at a time.